SLING CARE GUIDE

Every sling is individually marked with recommended wash and care instructions.
Failure to follow wash and care instructions could result in possible cross infection, reduced sling life or premature failure.

GENERAL CARE

Fabric naturally deteriorates over time with repeated washing. Slings are also subject to the additional exposure of considerable loading. As such the life of a sling will vary accordingly determined by user requirements and hygiene policies. As resulting deterioration potentially affects safety, **Care & Independence strongly recommend replacing the sling at the first signs of wear or damage, as opposed to after a specified time frame.**

Careful pre-use inspection for fabric degradation and robustness of straps, bindings and stitching is recommended. It is also a health & safety requirement that the sling label must be legible throughout the sling's working lifetime.

DECONTAMINATION & INFECTION CONTROL

1) For best hygiene practice, **Care & Independence do not recommend that slings are shared**. If more than one person requires hoisting, it is strongly recommended that each user is allocated their own appropriate sling and a note made of the sling serial number against the person's name in their care plan. If the sling is proposed to be used with more than one person, consultation with an infection control specialist on how to avoid the risk of cross infection is advised.

2) Where cross infection *is* an issue, a Care & Independence sling can withstand up to 95°C with the wash duration time conforming to the local infection control policy. However lower wash temperatures will increase the life of the sling. Washing instructions for all Care & Independence slings are printed on the sling label and in the sling User Guide.

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FACTORS THAT REDUCE THE LIFE OF A SLING

- Incorrect washing is the primary cause of damaged slings.
  - Washing and drying at high temperature (removes slippery coatings, fades colours and causes shrinkage).
  - Washing with hook and loop fasteners open (pilling of fabric and damages straps).
  - Washing in Ozone systems (fades labels and may weaken sling).
  - Use of bleach or stain removers (fades labels and weakens the sling).
- Thermal disinfection
  - Removes slippery coatings
  - Fades colours
  - Causes shrinkage
  - May weaken sling
- Biological detergent
  - Can degrade foam and/or fade label depending on enzymes used.
- Frequency of use and / or method being used.
- Weight of person being lifted or significant sudden movements.
- Storage in a hot or damp environment.
- Exposure to hostile environments, e.g. swimming pool chemicals.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Laundry treatments at high and low temperatures
The process of laundering contaminated linen (including slings) requires treatment that is effectively a wash-based disinfection process, and is required to avoid cross infection from re-used items.

Contaminated linen is generated by hospitals, care homes, nursing homes and similar facilities, as well as in the home care setting; anywhere that care of the sick and infirm is undertaken. The nature of laundry soiling depends on the source. The nature of the soiling will determine how contaminated items are sorted and processed, and current UK categorisation recommends sorting into used linen (soiled and foul), infected linen and heat labile (products which are prone to destruction or permanent alteration by heat) linen categories.

Infected linen is defined as linen derived from known infectious patients, including those with HIV, hepatitis B, C and other infectious agents. Linen can be made safe by washing to remove any contaminating body fluids, but it is often not practical to wash domestic linen at high temperatures because of the heat lability of fabrics. Recommended wash conditions, based on the levels of soiling, are as follows:

Current recommended treatments to ensure cleaning and disinfection of used (soiled and foul) linen

- A 65°C temperature hold for a minimum of 10 minutes within the wash cycle; or 71°C for not less than 3 minutes;
- Mixing time must be allowed to ensure heat penetration and assured disinfection. A sluice cycle must be added in to the cycle when dealing with **foul** linen;
- Recommended treatment to ensure disinfection of infected linen (mainly applicable to the healthcare setting):
    - Linen in this category should not be sorted, other than in a red, water-soluble bag - this then placed in an outer polyester or nylon carriage bag. Infected linen may be stored in different bags in other parts of the UK, e.g. clear with red stripes are used in parts of Scotland. Local policy should be checked and adhered to.
    - Inner bag should be removed from the outer bag only at the point of transfer to the washer-extractor, followed by the outer bag.
    - Storage of infected linen must be done in a secured area, prior to washing.
    - The same wash temperature profile as used for used (soiled and foul) linen is thought sufficient to inactivate HIV, but the evidence is less certain for hepatitis B. The wash temperature, coupled with the dilution factor, should render linen safe to handle on cycle completion.

Current recommended treatment to ensure disinfection of heat labile linen

- These items need to be washed at ~40°C, so the wash temperature is insufficient to disinfect, and chemical alternatives are required;
- Addition of hypochlorite may be possible, but efficacy may be reduced by the presence of soiling, detergents and alkalis in the main wash;
- Disinfection with hypochlorite is only reliable if the linen can tolerate its addition and if sodium hypochlorite is added during the penultimate rinse of the cycle;
- A final concentration of 150 ppm available chlorine must be achieved for a minimum of 5 minutes exposure time.

Laundering contaminated items in the community setting. Existing guidance states that in the community setting or elsewhere without access to specialist services, contaminated clothing or linen should be treated in one of the following ways:

- *Washed with detergent using the hot wash cycle of a domestic washing machine to a temperature of at least 80°C; or
- Dry cleaned at elevated temperatures, or dry cleaned cold followed by steam pressing; or
- Incinerated if items cannot be effectively washed as described above

*Dilution is an important part of the washing process and therefore machine overloading should be avoided. If washing by hand is unavoidable, household rubber gloves must be worn.

The reality of domestic laundering may be somewhat different from this ideal for those living with Blood Borne Viruses (BBV) in the home environment. Domestic washing machines rarely have an 80oC setting. If this is the case, if contamination is not excessive, all potentially contaminated linen should be washed at the highest possible temperature recommended for that particular fabric. The combination of temperature (when more than 40°C), detergent action and dilution effect during the wash and rinse steps, will contribute to the process of soil removal and disinfection for the washed item.

REFERENCES:

1) Laundry Treatments at High and Low Temperatures
2) NHS Executive HSG(95)18. Hospital laundry arrangements for used and infected linen (under review).
3) Infection Control Guidance for Care Homes (2006). A UK Department of Health publication. Ref. No. 275698..
4) The UK Health Departments Guidance for Clinical Health Care Workers: Protection against infection with blood-borne viruses. Recommendations of the expert advisory group on Aids..